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NARRATOR

Ruth Schwerin
Signature of narrator

RUTH SCHWERIN (MRS.)
Name of narrator

1942 REILEZ VALLEY RD, LAFAYETTE CALIF.
Address

10/30/81
(dated)

INTERVIEWER

Elaine R. Hammill
Signature of interviewer

ELAINE R. HAMMILL
Name of interviewer

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WALNUT CREEK, CALIF 94598
(dated) 10/30/81

Accepted for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project

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General Topic of Interview West Oakland History

Date 10/28/81 Place Residence, Lafayette, CA Length 1hr 40 mins.

Narrator	Interviewer
Name Mrs. Ruth Schwerin (H. Olivin)	Name Elaine R. Hammill
Address 1442 Reliez VAlley Rd., Lafayette	Address 396 La Casa Via, Walnut Creek CA.
Name & address of relative, friend	Relationship to narrator [friend, neighbor, etc.] Aunt of friend, CLayton Russell
Birthplace West Oakland	Length of acquaintance
Birthdate 1894	Occasion of interview ~~Norkk~~ Oakland Neighborhood History Project
Occupation(s)	

Interview Data

Subjects covered, in approximate order, spelling out names of persons and places mentioned

Estimated Time on Tape	Contents
1 Side A Part I	From Kansas; grandparents come to SF; run stables
11	father worked for ~~"Stigler & Kern"~~ "STEIGER & KERR" Iron Stoves SF
41	days, iron works Oakland at nite (2nd & Castro) 1901
44	5th & Center St = 1st house
48	uncle's "dog-power" water wheel
55	5th & Grove = 2nd house
63	father engineer; mother 1893
68	Ruth born 1894 at Center St. home
70	Myrtle St= 3rd house
	1906 earthquake; awakened by fire near foundry;
98	mother catches glassware in nitegown; people coming fr. SF; father fell watching from cupalo at iron wrks.
106	"home" phone
114	East Bay Hospital above 14th=1st hospital Oakland
117	mother died 2 yrs. after father
120	orphaned with $150 per month
133	48th Ave, East Oakland=4th house (Melrose)
152	Lake Merritt Wayne Ave =6th house (5th=Fairfax)
	1904 move to Melrose for bigger house; sold land,
174	water, $1.50 per mon.
180	father's eng. degree by correspondence
	grandfaterh had owned land in Lafayette while still in SF (near where Mrs. S. now lives)

Use back of sheet if necessary

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214 Myrtle St. neighborhood; 25' house; animals;
Mackay's Lumber in SF; wealthy homes; 7th & Pine
St. house; sea captains
235 mud in streets of Okland
248 Thompkins School, 3rd & Linden (Filbert); Mrs. Walton
principal (has picture); schoolday; Italians; Italian
neighbor from 3rd St. becomes neighbor in Lafayette.
280 food shopping; Iven & Myers on 7th St; bakery 5th &
Myrtle; Chinese yardage store, 5¢ per yd.
314 Italian neighbors making wine; neighbors all invited
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335 3rd & Folsom in SF for 1 yr to "please mother"-
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Jackson; 14th & Market; dances
370 children walk to Lake Merritt "all marsh there,
you'll sink in the mud"
388 John Davies & girlfriend
398 Pardee; de Fremery
428 Shellmound Park picnics with mother; swampland;
outdoor dance; horse races
461 toys made from cast-offs; scrap-iron trains'
485 Mrs. S. working in foundry
492 no women worked outside home; "hands full at home"
Schleuter store = Mrs. S's first job 9 years old;
cash girl, $2 per week; tips
532 Phoenix Foundry workers (has picture)
548 paying workers by cash
554 8 yr. old to Alameda to get worker (8th St. to High
St. bridge)
570 Alameda shacks; Italian poor
591 7th St. train to Fruitvale, then Melrose; Fruitvale
farmland, "good place to raise kids"; "best weather
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Side B - Part II

1 Leona Heights quarry above Lincoln Ave; source of cla
9 apple orchard for kids
14 S.P. workers 1st to live in Fruitvale (melrose);
2 miles to nearest transportation
20 schools attact more people
22 lumber yard in Melrose E. 14th=1 of few businesses
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58 Brother Sam to new Tech. High to learn pattern
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107 Uncle Sam in SF bringing candy; early Mill Valley
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123 Bay Bridge; ferry boats safer
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neighborhood life

313 Italians at Myrtle St neighborhood
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334 German section 14th & Myrtle
344 Chinese peddlers
351 rag, bottle. sacks man; children taunt
389 milk man; nearest dairy end of Fruitvale Ave; making cottage cheese
375 remebers no discrimination; baby sitting 8 yrs old
389 no crime; no key to house
398 fire dept across fr. friend's house 3rd & Jackson
417 bums sleeping in pipes at iron works (foundry fire)
423 Depression "heard fr. breakfast to dinner"; worked s rubbing floors for firend
433 Mrs. S. 1st marriage, 2nd
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543 all renters; only wealthy bought houses
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565 Pantages, Novelty, Liberty Theaters; Chioda Candy

Side A
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END

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OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ruth Schwerin

Interview October 28, 1981 in Lafayette by Elaine Hammill for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project. Verbatim transcription and summary prepared by Karana Hattersley-Drayton, November 1994, Anthropological Studies Center, Sonoma State University Academic Foundation, Inc. for the Cypress I-880 Replacement Project, District 4, CALTRANS.

Ruth Schwerin was born in 1894 at the family home built by her paternal uncle at 5th and Center Streets in West Oakland. Her maiden name is unfortunately not included in the interview. Her father was of Scotch-Irish descent and came to San Francisco from Leavenworth, Kansas. He worked for Steiger and Kerr in San Francisco and made iron stoves. According to Mrs. Schwerin he began to "moonlight" at a foundry in Oakland, eventually starting the Phoenix Iron Works in 1901. His partner was David Gill and the Works made (initially) cast iron manhole covers. Eventually the company employed up to thirty workers.

Mrs. Schwerin's mother was a German(-American ?) also from Kansas although she had grown up in San Francisco. Her mother belonged to the local German Turnverine Club and took her daughter along with her to dances and social events.

The interview draws a very poignant portrait of a poor, German-American working class family at the turn-of-the-century. Mrs. Schwerin attended the Thompkins School where most of her classmates were Italians. She also worked as a nine-year-old for the Schluter (?) Store as a Cash Girl at Christmas time.

(The following transcription is a verbatim text in standard English with little or no editing. ~~Project funds did not allow for a subject index.~~)

OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ruth Schwerin

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[Tape is cued up.]

Elaine Hammill: "Mrs. Schwerin, we'll plunge right in as I told you and I'll ask you first of all about your grandparents then, who lived in Kansas. Is that right? And what brought them to Oakland?"

Mrs. Schwerin: "I really couldn't tell you."

Hammill: "Ok. You don't remember about the grandparents."

Schwerin: "No."

Hammill: "All right."

Schwerin: "My mother's ... grandmother died when she was eleven years old. So then he took the children himself [?] and then they came out, he brought them all out to San Francisco."

Hammill: "This is your mother's father?"

Schwerin: "This is my mother's father. And then they lived in San Francisco."

Hammill: "You don't remember why they came particularly then to San Francisco?"

Schwerin: "No. And he and his cousins owned this stable and the name was Foley-"

Hammill: "In Kansas?"

Schwerin: "No. Here in San Francisco. And they had a hearse that they used to bury people or to get them married. They had this one hearse with the horses. And he helped them run that for years."

Hammill: "...what part of San Francisco did he [?]...?"

Schwerin: "I couldn't tell you-"

Hammill: "So your mother grew up in San Francisco."

Schwerin: "Yes."

Hammill: "All right. And then your father meanwhile, he came from Kansas also."

Schwerin: "He came from Leavenworth, Kansas."

Hammill: "They didn't know each other, the families didn't know each other."

Schwerin: "No. And then my father worked for Steiger and Kerr, the people that made stoves, iron stoves. And he got interested in iron. So then he wanted to start a business of his own. So what he did, he started the business of his own but he worked in the daytime for Steiger and Kerr in San Francisco. Then he'd take the 5 cent nickle ferry across the Bay and go to work at night and pour iron and cast iron and cover it with dirt. And then the next day, when it go cold, he'd take all the dirt off of the iron and have iron. They made all these manhole [covers] all around Oakland."

Hammill: "Oh even then, they started out doing manhole covers."

Schwerin: "Yes. But of course they were rougher than they are now."

Hammill: "He lived then in San Francisco and commute over to work?"

Schwerin: "Yes."

Hammill: "...and his family had come with him? How old was he when he came to San Francisco?"

Schwerin: "I couldn't tell you."

Hammill: "He was a young boy and unmarried, at any rate."

Schwerin: "Yes, he was unmarried. And then-"

Hammill: "And then he became interested in the foundry business-"

Schwerin: "The foundry business. So then he come over at night, and where the foundry was, at Second and Castro, was an old old, terrible old building, but for iron you had to have the dirt. So it didn't really matter and they did business in that old building until two or three years ago and then they sold it to the City. And then the City never used it."

Hammill: "They just moved to their new location."

Schwerin: "And they moved to the new location. That's what made them move."

Hammill: "So it was a going foundry business. Was it called the Phoenix Iron Works at that time?"

Schwerin: "No, no."

Hammill: "Do you remember what it was called?"

Schwerin: "Uh, they didn't have a name for it. They just did odd things... but when my father started it in 1901 is when he gave it the name Phoenix."

Hammill: "Because of San Francisco?"

Schwerin: "No, I don't know why. Phoenix means something. It always had a picture of a man.... Then when he married he moved over her, Fifth and Center Street and lived with his mother and father. And they had a two-story house that my uncle built."

Hammill: "Oh, at Fifth and Center?"

Schwerin: "At fifth and Center. And then my uncle built this waterwheel, a great big water wheel that pumped water. The dogs would get in it and run the mill. And then the people complained that it was cruelty to animals so he had to take it down but that's the way they got their water."

Hammill: "You mean it was dog-powered....?"

Schwerin: "Dog-power made it go around. Then we lived with my grandmother and grandfather for quite some time. And then from there we moved up to Fifth and Grove, right near Fifth and Grove. Then my grandfather up and died in the meantime and then my grandmother came to live with us then. Then my mother had four children and my grandmother and my father and my uncle Sam, he lived with us."

Hammill: "All right, so the family had gradually moved over from San Francisco. Father and his parents. And where did your mother and dad meet in San Francisco...?"

Schwerin: "Well evidentially, my father was an engineer. And he worked on these engines. And for some reason or another my mother used to go and visit him. And they got more acquainted and more acquainted. My mother was a very jolly person and she was German and she was out for a good time! And so then they married-"

Hammill: "What year was that? Do you recall the date?"

Schwerin: "Gee, they were married eleven months from when I was born. So it must have been 19 [she's thinking about the date.]

Hammill: "Ok, let's ask you when you were born."

Schwerin: "See I was born, I think they were only married about a year and a half when I was born."

Hammill: "And you were born in 1890-?"

Schwerin: "1894, in November."

Hammill: "In Oakland."

Schwerin: "In Oakland. Yeah. On Center Street."

Hammill: "At home? Were you born at home at Center Street?"

Schwerin: "Oh yes. Everybody was born at home. And then my sister came along. And then we moved from there up to Fifth and Grove. And we took my grandmother with us--- wasn't a very big house. But they all lived with us. And my mother took care of all of them. And from there we moved back to Myrtle Street."

Hammill: "Ok. Now what made you move...?"

Schwerin: "The house was bigger and we had a chance to rent it. And we lived in that house when the earthquake came out [?]"

Hammill: "And old were you? You were ten [sic]."

Schwerin: "Ten years old. [Ed. note: She would have been eleven.] And in the middle of the night my father said, 'I hear the fire engines and they sound like they're near the foundry. Get up and go down and look and see where it is!' This was 2 o'clock in the morning. Me, ten years old! So I went ... down, came down and told my father that the foundry was burning. It so happened that there was a big warehouse next to us, next to the foundry, and that's what was burning. So then of course my father got up and called the fire department which was a little one horse rig with a horse and it took them an hour or so to get down there. But they saved the foundry. See, there wasn't much to burn inside. It was all dirt and iron."

Hammill: "And your father had gone up to the cupola?"

Schwerin: "So then after that, then's when the earthquake came. And the morning of the earthquake, my poor mother stood with her nightgown catching the beautiful glassware that came from Germany that she put way up high so we kids wouldn't break it. So here she's catching it in her nightgown. And so then we-"

Hammill: "So this is 4 o'clock in the morning...?"

Schwerin: "Six o'clock.... Then all of a sudden we saw all these people coming, with no clothes on, bird cage and whatnot. See, San Francisco was burning. So then the people that came over on the train [sic] and they dumped them any old place in Oakland. And we lived on Fifth Street and the train ran on Seventh Street."

Hammill: "They come over by ferry and then get on the train and then just be taken to somebody's house or something?"

Schwerin: "Well, they just dumped them. They were getting them out of San Francisco. ...then that night, my father went down to see the fire burning and he went up the ladder to the roof. And they had taken out the big cupola, the day before. And he'd forgotten that and he had a candle. And the candle went out. And he tried to find his way and he fell down through that hole, and fell on a piece of iron. And cracked his ribs. Then it happened that Mr. Gill, my father's partner's son, he was going to do the same thing: he came down and he heard my father crying and hollering so he got my father in his horse and buggy and took him to the doctor. Then, we had two telephones in the house. One was called 'the home phone.' And you paid a dollar a month for that. And if you were in business you had to have both phone[s]. But eventually, American Tell and Tell bought the Home Phone Company out and now today the phone is run like the home phone company was. Push button.

And then I was only ten years old [sic] and so of course I had to go up to the hospital where my father was every day to visit him. Cause my mother had three children home, the baby, she had to take care of."

Hammill: "... what hospital?"

Schwerin: "East Bay they called it. They called it East Bay Hospital."

Hammill: "And where was that located, do you remember?"

Schwerin: "Oh, it was an off-street of Broadway."

Hammill: "Not far. Not as far up as 14th maybe...?"

Schwerin: "No, it was further up than 14th. It was kind of wilderness and they built this---it was an old home they turned into a hospital. And then from then, then's when they built Fabiola. Yeah. And then-"

Hammill: "So you visited your father while he was in the hospital?"

Schwerin: "Oh yeah."

Hammill: "Actually, you... mentioned in an earlier conversation that he really died from that injury...."

Schwerin: "Yeah, because they bound him, his broken ribs up. In those days they used to do that. And one of the ribs grew into the valve of the heart and that's what killed him. And then my mother died, two years later, I think more of grief, and four kids to take care of and whatnot. But he did leave a little money. He made a will out before that and he left a little money in trust for us children. And we got a $150 a month to run the house with. And I was the oldest one and I had to run the house with a $150."

Hammill: "For heavens sake. So you stayed? Did you stay then?"

Schwerin: "Well... before my mother died we moved out to East Oakland. Right near Fremont High School."

Hammill: "By this time you were two girls and two boys in the family?"

Schwerin: "Yes, uh-huh. My father died then, at that house. [Uncle Tom had built this new house---built like the 'Rock of Gibraltar.' House theoretically 'temporary' but used 2 x 6" lumber, dug a well. Stayed there for 'quite some time.' Moved to a larger house which they rented in Melrose. They then moved to a flat near Lake Merritt. Mother died at this residence. Mrs. Schwerin was sixteen at the time. Moved back to 48th Avenue. Sister and she fought about house budget of $150. Mrs. Schwerin got married. Grandmother stayed with three siblings that were left.]

Hammill: "Well tell me, to back up just a little bit. You moved from West Oakland then to Melrose on 48th Avenue mostly because you needed a larger place...."

Schwerin: "My father wanted to build a house so he bought this land."

Hammill: "Ok. So it was wide open then in those days. Were there some houses around-"

Schwerin: "Very few, very few. The high school wasn't there and the street car wasn't there.... [Fremont High School and street car line put in later. Moved around 1904? Father bought a city block and then sold all the land except the corner lot which he reserved for them. Dug well and sold it to other owners for $1.50 a month; other residents of block could use all the water they wanted. Mrs. Schwerin had to go and collect the money. Difficult to do at times. After father died they moved to Fairfax Avenue. Mrs. Schwerin was always told that she took after her father: enterprising.]

Hammill: "When he [your father] came from Kansas did he have an engineering degree...?"

Schwerin: "He did it by correspondence. He had books that he sent for. And he'd sit up at night and he got an engineering degree from a correspondence course." [His parents came out from Kansas, eventually lived right down the street from them.]

Hammill: "[Recaps father's history, came to San Francisco, self-educated, eventually started up Phoenix Iron Works.] And then he brought in Mr. Gill. What was Mr. Gill's first name?"

Schwerin: "David Gill."

Hammill: "David Gill, as a partner, so he could afford to buy the foundry. And that was in 19-"

Schwerin: "I think there were 900 shares. And my father bought 500 shares and Gill owned 400 shares. And then eventually, after Mr. Gill died, my father bought Gill's shares."

Hammill: "And that was in 1901 that they established this partnership. And ... their main business then was making the cast iron manhole covers, or did they do everything?"

Schwerin: "That was about all the iron business was in those days, that's about all you could make out of iron."

Hammill: "What was your memory of what it was like in the neighborhood? What did the neighborhood look like, both where your homes were (your Center Street and Myrtle Street) and the Phoenix Iron Works."

Schwerin: "There was nothing down there. And finally, I think it's a gas company came in and put in a great big tank right next to the foundry."

Hammill: "So the foundry was alone down there."

Schwerin: "It was alone there, just an old shack."

Hammill: "Do you remember the piers that would be, like at the foot of Broadway? ...wasn't there the nickle ferry...?"

Schwerin: "Nickle ferry came in after. But the foundry was as far as Oakland went. It was a tract of land---the foundry was on Second Street--and there was a tract of land on First Street and then it was marsh. It was all marsh. And my father wanted to buy that but he couldn't afford to do that and then the foundry too. So he didn't buy it. But that marsh land is worth a fortune now...."

Hammill: "...so where were the first houses then? On what-"

Schwerin: "Well, I would say up on Fifth Street were the first houses that were built."

Hammill: "And in your first house, that was on Myrtle, were you old enough to remember what that looked like?"

Schwerin: "The house on Myrtle Street? Yes. The next door to us was the MacKey's, people by the name of MacKey's that owned a big lumber yard. And they had a lovely home. But our home, I think, was 25' wide. But it ran back and we used to raise chickens and ducks and things like that in that little bit of a yard."

Hammill: "And what were the other neighbors, do you remember any of the other neighbors? Where was the MacKey's lumber yard, for example?"

Schwerin: "I think that was in San Francisco. But then West Oakland, all the wealthy people had a home there. They were big homes. [Hammill asks about Ghiradellis. Mrs. Schwerin says they built on Lake Merritt. Tries to remember another large home which is still there, 7th and Pine.] That was a great big old house. See, they were all sea captains. And they were used to the sea. So they wanted everything big."

Hammill: "...the large houses would be in the center of a large tract of land?"

Schwerin: "Yea. At least had three or four acres."

Hammill: "You must be remembering then before, when the streets weren't paved, there were horses and carriages. Do you remember when the oak trees were still in the middle of the street? And that sort of thing?"

Schwerin: "Yes. And the mud would be about two feet thick when it rained. And of we'd have to plough through the mud;

we'd bring boards and put them down, and sacks and put them down. And then little by little they'd pave 'em. But they didn't pave them nice like they do today."

Hammill: "How long were you at the house on Myrtle Street? Until you were how old?"

Schwerin: "We moved there when I was about eight years old and we moved when I was ten."

Hammill: "Oh, then it's Center Street I guess I'm thinking of, that's where you were born."

Schwerin: "Center Street... well, that's, my sister was here. So I must have been about six years old."

Hammill: "What do you remember of the Center Street house then?"

Schwerin: "I know that it had a bannister and we kids used to slide down the bannister and my sister fell off and they blamed it onto me, that I pushed her off! [Laughter]"

Hammill: "Oh dear. Do you remember anything about what the street looked like?"

Schwerin: "It wasn't paved. ...when it rained it was nothing but mud and slush."

Hammill: "Do you remember what your neighbors were like...?"

Schwerin: "I was too young."

Hammill: "So Myrtle Street was your first [memory]. ... do you remember any of your neighbors [besides MacKey's]."

Schwerin: "No, I don't. There was a Thompkins School that I went to. And ... the teacher told my mother that I didn't see too good and that I should have my eyes examined. So she did and the doctor put glasses on me. And I as a kid didn't want the ones with the rim on [she talked her mother into letting her have these. A ball was hit and knocked off and broke the glasses and thereafter she had to have glasses with a rim.] That was the old Thompkins School on Third and Linden, between Linden and Filbert. And then the name of the principal was Mrs. Walton. And she was a 2 by 4. And every class was in one room, you know, in those days."

Hammill: "How many children were in the school?"

Schwerin: "I have a picture of 'em and I don't think there was more than thirty children in the whole school."

Hammill: "Of all ages."

Schwerin: "Yeah. All ages. From Kindergarten on up."

Hammill: "...was it a school day like we have today?"

Schwerin: "Then we got out at 2 [pm]... and then we went home for lunch. Yeah."

Hammill: "Two o'clock you'd go home for lunch?"

Schwerin: "No 12 o'clock."

Hammill: "Oh, and then you'd come back-

Schwerin: "You see, everybody lived within walking distance. Kids, it wasn't known that kids would be driven to school. Everybody would have jumped on them and kidded them. You wouldn't dare come in a horse and buggy."

Hammill: "So there was one teacher for the thirty children?"

Schwerin: "Well, I think there was the Principal and then I think there was only one or two, one other teacher maybe."

Hammill: "What were you taught? What were the subjects, do you remember?"

Schwerin: "The regular school: reading, writing and arithmetic. We didn't have any football and basketball and all that kind of junk."

Hammill: "No special stuff?"

Schwerin: "No. No we were lucky to get school."

Hammill: "Were there children there who were different ethnic groups who didn't speak English...?"

Schwerin: "Mostly all Italian. Later on when we bought this place, the man who used to live across the street used to live right near me on Third Street but I didn't know him. They come over from Italy. And there were rooming houses and then they'd work for their room and board."

Hammill: "What was his name?"

Schwerin: "Rossie."

Hammill: "... where would you do your shopping? Where would your mother go shopping, food shopping when she was on Myrtle Street?"

Schwerin: "On Seventh Street."

Hammill: "Ok. ...what do you remember about 7th Street?"

Schwerin: "Seventh Street was Iben and Nors [?]. There was a big ol' grocery store there called Iben and Nors. [She spells it.] They were partners and they had this grocery store and they sold everything."

Hammill: "On Seventh Street about where?"

Schwerin: "On ... the corner of Seventh and Myrtle."

Hammill: "Oh ok. So that was big enough to handle the weekly shopping?"

Schwerin: "Oh everybody did their shopping. But they didn't have money enough in those days. You shopped every day. And there was a baker, the big bakery, a French bakery on 5th and ... Myrtle. And they used to sell, they never used to wrap the bread in those days, and you could get French bread that was a day old, maybe four or five loaves for twenty-five cents."

Hammill: "What was the name of the French bakery, do you remember?"

Schwerin: "I couldn't tell you, I couldn't tell you. But my mother would send me up with 25 cents, and we come home with a whole stack of bread."

Hammill: "What other stores were there? Were there clothing stores that you remember?"

Schwerin: "Well there's, Chinese sold yardage, like a department store. It was a little one horse thing. But they did send material. In those days, everybody had to sew. You couldn't go up and buy a dress or anything like we did. You could buy the whole shop for the price you pay for a couple of dresses today."

Hammill: "And so you'd buy yardage."

Schwerin: "And I could remember buying, I wanted to sew, and I needed three yards to make a dress and it was five cents a yard. So I had fifteen cents, I don't know or I had saved it up. And I got three yards and I made a dress. And I made the pleats, the skirt was pleated and evidentially I turned the skirt over and pleated it so when I put it on the pleats ran the wrong way. And I went to the party, some party that they had. And this woman said, 'Oh, you made the pleats wrong, the wrong way.' And it made me so mad that I never ran a pleat the wrong way again as long as I lived!"

Hammill: "... did you play right out, with your schoolmates and so forth, right out of school-"

Schwerin: "In the street."

Hammill: "Yeah in the street. Who were your playmates, do you remember?"

Schwerin: "Well, they mostly all were Italian. And they made their own wine. And they'd get a big truck of grapes would stop in the front of their house and the next day the men would all go in the basement and step on these grapes and crush grapes with their feet. And they'd make wine. Then they drink the wine and they'd all get drunk."

Hammill: "Have big parties. Would they invite you, would your parents be invited?"

Schwerin: "You didn't invite people in those days. No, it's in the neighborhood, there's only about six or eight neighbors there. You all knew, you came if you wanted to, if you didn't want to, you didn't come."

Hammill: "So your parents would go back and forth with the Italian neighbors?"

Schwerin: "My parents, my father was always too busy. He never had, never, all his life, he was never [sic] too busy to do anything."

Hammill: "And your mother, however, would she then take you kids?"

Schwerin: "Well my mother's sister lived in San Francisco. You could go to San Francisco and back for 30 cents. You could walk to the nickle ferry and pay a nickle. Then you could take the streetcar in San Francisco and go out to see my mother's aunt, for a nickle. And then you could come back and take the nickle ferry and walk to my house. I guess it was twenty cents. And my mother had a hard job getting my father to give her twenty cents, to go to the City. He said, 'If I give you anymore I wouldn't see you for a week!'"

Hammill: "Where did your mother's sister live in San Francisco?"

Schwerin: "[Can't remember]. "Then one time, my mother loved San Francisco, she hated Oakland. So my father condescended [stops to remember], my brother Sam was born in San Francisco. And we moved to San Francisco on Third and Folsom Street. And we only lived there about a year. And my brother Sam was born. And then we moved back to Oakland.

My father did it to please my mother because she loved San Francisco and the highlights and everything."

Hammill: "Because there was so much going on there?"

Schwerin: "Yeah. Well, in those days, there wasn't much going on. But there was a lot more than was going on in Oakland."

Hammill: [That was between the Myrtle House and the 48th Avenue house.] "Let's go back to when you were a child in Myrtle Street for example. What did your parents do for fun then? Your father really didn't do much of anything. Were they members of a church...?"

Schwerin: "My mother was German, so she belonged to the German Turnverine. That was a big club in Oakland, a German club. German Turnverine. And of course my mother wanted me to learn to speak German and my father would laugh when I talked. So finally he realized his mistake and he sent me to a German School. And then I learned German pretty good."

Hammill: "And where was that? Was that sponsored by this German [club]?"

Schwerin: "A church on 14th and Market: there was a German church. And I'd go up there and take German lessons. I still have the German book."

Hammill: "And ... was your mother an active member of that church?"

Schwerin: "No. My Mother---she was too busy cooking for all the kids and the relatives."

Hammill: "So the outings which you had as a family-"

Schwerin: "She would walk to the German Turnverine and that must have been on Third and Jackson."

Hammill: "Now what does 'Turnverine' mean? Is that the name of a society?"

Schwerin: "Turnverine, I don't know. They called it the German Turnverine. And we'd go up there and then they'd dance and make music and oh, she loved that. And she'd take me with her. And I'd get so tired and I thought, 'Oh, if she'd only say *'Auf Widersein,'* and go home. I couldn't wait till she said that. And of course they said that a half a dozen times before they got [through]."

Hammill: "That would be her only outing then, to go there?"

Schwerin: "That's the only outing I ever remember my mother had. Yeah."

Hammill: "What would you do for fun as you grew up then? You mention going to Lake Merritt. What did your mother say about going as a child...?"

Schwerin: "Well, we children would go for a walk. And then they built the City Hall. So we wanted to go up and see that big building they were talking about. So we'd walk up there from Myrtle Street to the City Hall. That was a long walk. And my mother would say, 'Don't go down past the City Hall because that's all marsh.' And that's Lake Merritt and you'll sink in the mud. And don't go down there. There's tules and all the bad men are down there. And don't go down there."

Hammill: "That was obviously before they started building homes around the lake and cleaning it up."

Schwerin: "Well, they filled in the marsh."

Hammill: "Before they built the dam."

Schwerin: "Yes. That's when they filled it in. They built the dam and then filled that in."

Hammill: "Do you remember as a child your parents talking about some of the 'big names' of Oakland? Like Carpentier and any of these people, Adams. Do you remember?"

Schwerin: "The Adams family, yeah. And another one that began with 'D.' And then there was a mayor of Oakland. And he was a great big fat fella and he rode a little horse and buggy around and he always wore a carnation."

Hammill: "John Davie?"

Schwerin: "Mayor Davie. And then he had a girlfriend. And she, I think, was a mistress."

Hammill: "And she was with him?"

Schwerin: "She was a great big fella [sic], person, and she wore a great big hat with feathers in it, and she'd sit with him and they'd ride around."

Hammill: "Oh, nodding to all the people [chuckles]."

Schwerin: "...they called her a madame. But her real name was I don't know. But this Mayor Davies wore a great big funny hat and a mustache."

Hammill: "Yeah, I remember my parents talking about him too. Do you remember the Pardee Family, their house was on-"

Schwerin: "Pardee. 'D.' That's who-"

Hammill: "Is that who you were thinking of?"

Schwerin: "Pardee. Yeah. They lived down in West Oakland. And they had a great big home."

Hammill: "One of the sisters is still alive and living in the house."

Schwerin: "I was gonna say: I bet someone's still living there."

Hammill: "It's, uh Helen."

Schwerin: "Yeah, Pardee...."

Hammill: "So that was the home that you were mentioning that was nearby yours. You think?"

Schwerin: "Well, it was on 7th Street... and Filbert, I think they were on Filbert, 7th and Filbert. They had about a whole block. [Hammill mentions that she only knew about Pardee house on 11th and Castro. Didn't know that there was an earlier home in Oakland. Another family on 7th with big house also. They discuss this confusion. Hammill wonders if she is referring to the DeFermery House which also stands. Yes, this is the name Mrs. Schwerin was trying to recall.] "Yeah, that was a whole square block and they had a fence around the whole thing."

Hammill: "That they called what, 'the Grove' or something?"

Schwerin: "I forget the name, I didn't know the name."

Hammill: "Do you remember the ... races that they used to have, the horse races, or any of that sort of thing...?"

Schwerin: "In Oakland? ...not that far down. It was up more towards Emeryville. Emeryville then of course was just swamp."

Hammill: "Do you remember going to the parks? Any of the parks, ...Shellmound Park. Did your family do any [of that]?"

Schwerin: "[Quickly] Shellmound Park, we used to there for picnics."

Hammill: "You did?"

Schwerin: "Oh we kids couldn't wait until the day come that we go there for a picnic. Cause we had sack races and ... they probably gave you a nickle if you won."

Hammill: "How, how would you get there?"

Schwerin: "Walk."

Hammill: "You'd walk."

Schwerin: "We'd walk. We walked every place."

Hammill: "Would your whole family come, was it a picnic day for the whole family?"

Schwerin: "My father never did, he never had time. But my mother'd take us."

Hammill: "Mother and the children."

Schwerin: "She had one baby in the buggy and another standing and holding the buggy and another one hanging on to the buggy."

Hammill: "What did it look like there at Shellmound Park...? I understand they had a big dance [stand?]"

Schwerin: "Just swamp, just swamp. And that place must have stuck out and it was dry. But there was water all around it."

Hammill: "So there was a large dance floor with lights around it?"

Schwerin: "Outdoor dance floor..."

Hammill: "That was built right on the shellmound."

Schwerin: "Yes. Shellmound Park, that was the only park that I could ever remember."

Hammill: "And all your friends liked to go there and they'd spend the day?"

Schwerin: "Shellmound Park: that's where they used to have the horse races."

Hammill: "It was, out in that area. Do you remember seeing those? Some of these people I understand who built the large homes in West Oakland would have horses and so forth and would race them out there."

Schwerin: "Right. But no, my mother would never let us go near there: she couldn't keep track of us. [Notes that they were wild for a while and her mother had difficulty keeping 'track of them.']

Hammill: "But you would spend the day out there. You'd take a picnic lunch?"

Schwerin: "Oh yeah. Take a lunch and stay all day. Never wanted to go home."

Hammill: "Were there rides or anything like that...? What would you do?"

Schwerin: "There might have been a merry-go-round. An old fashioned merry-go-round, and we never had any money to get on it."

Hammill: "Would you play games then, make up your own games? How would you spend the day?"

Schwerin: "No, just fightin' [both laugh]."

Hammill: "...all this time running around and fighting!"

Schwerin: "Yeah. Well we never had all these toys that the kids have today. The only kinds of toys I had was when we'd go lookin' through people's garbage and if there were some old wheels that they discarded from a baby buggy, we'd take them home and take a week to make a coaster. And then we'd ride it and then it would break and then we'd come back and spend the next week makin' a coaster again. And then my folks were in the iron business so we'd go down and go down thru the scrap iron and in those days they had a little iron train and when they'd break they'd throw them in the scrap iron. And we'd go through the scrap iron looking for the pieces of the little train."

Hammill: "What do you mean by train?"

Schwerin: "Cars, little cars that are made out of cast, made out of iron-"

Hammill: "Oh they really <u>were</u> ... little trains."

Schwerin: "They really were little trains, and they'd make them out of iron. See, when they'd break they'd throw them in the junk and then the cast iron people would put them in, and sell the cast iron."

Hammill: "Oh, and melt them down again. Yeah."

Schwerin: "And we'd sit and [?]"

Hammill: "So in other words, the foundry was almost in the toy business too? They were actually making little trains?"

Schwerin: "No, no dear. The people that he bought the cast iron from, and that was scrap iron, was called 'scrap iron,' and in that scrap was broken trains. [Hammill: "Oh I see, I see."] And we kids would look through it to find little pieces of broken-"

Hammill: "Anything that they can melt down in other words."

Schwerin: "They got so they could but we wanted to play with it."

Hammill: "I see.... At the foundry itself, did you have jobs there as kids?"

Schwerin: "I did. I went down and scrubbed the floor and scrubbed the black windows with a a little black iron [?]. And many times I scrubbed those old windows and my father'd say, 'You didn't get them clean yet.' I think he did it to keep me out of mischief."

Hammill: "But the boys didn't particularly?"

Schwerin: "They were too small. They were too small."

Hammill: "They were too small at that time. ...of course women didn't work. Did women in your neighborhood work? Your mother didn't have an outside job."

Schwerin: "No, nobody had a job. They had their hands full washin' by hand and cleaning the clothes and cookin'. No they never. The first time I ever worked I was nine years old. And the Schutter * family was another family that had a big home down there. And the Schutter Store sold Christmas ornaments. And at Christmas time they needed a cash girl. So at nine years old I went up to the Schutters and, afterwards I knew them socially, but they were kids too; one of the Schutter boys was in my grade at school. And he said, 'Go up to my father's place and he'll give you a job [as] Cash Girl.' And in those days the Cash Girl meant that they had a rope with a basket and you'd pull the rope down and put the stuff in the basket and pull the chain and it would go to the wrapping counter and they'd wrap it, see. And so I went up and got a job. And they paid me $2.00 a week. And I was a Cash Girl. And of course I've always been small and always been quick. And so they let me stay there and work, see.

* [Ed. note: although Mrs. Schwerin appears to be saying "Schutter" there is in fact no business listed by that name. The 1900 and 1915 City Directories do list, however, a Schlueter Store, at 13th and Washington Streets.]

So I'd get up there in the morning and I didn't want to lose my job and then the first time they'd call 'Cash,' I brought the basket over and this woman gave me ten cents. And I thought, 'My God! What's that for?' And evidentially I told the other girls and they
said that's what they call a tip. She tipped me ten cents. Well all [ ] had to do was [ ] up, another way to make money. So when ever they hollered 'Cash!' I'd run like mad. And I'd get some of these wealthy people would give me a nickle or dime, and boy, that was good money! But they sold Christmas ornaments. The Schutters always had a beautiful Christmas tree. They were German, from Germany. And they always had beautiful Christmas trees. And so that's the way I earned my first money."

Hammill: "Isn't that marvelous! Who were the workers at the foundry? Your father, I think you said, was of English, Irish and Scotch descent. [Schwerin: "Yea."] Mr. Gill was a Scotchman. How many workers did they have? Who were they?"

Schwerin: "The kids have got a picture of it; I had a picture and I gave it to them. ...finally, one time they had a big bunch of men, thirty men, and they took their picture. But there wasn't any color in those days."

Hammill: "Were they mostly Scotchmen or-"

Schwerin: "Well, I think they mostly were Scotch because he belonged to a Scotch organization. And I think he'd get them from there. And then ... when they paid their men off, they didn't have any checking---these men, they were ignorant, they wouldn't ever make a check out and the bank wouldn't know what to do with them. So, when they paid them, why they paid them in cash. And one time, when my father wanted a man to come to work, I had to take the street car, as a little kid, eight years old, and go to Alameda where the man lived, and tell him to come to work the next day. Eight years old! And I'd say to my father, 'Can't my sister go with me?' 'No, you can't go alone? You don't have to go.' [She has said this in a slightly deeper voice] Oh no, I wanted to go because I wanted to please him. And so I'll go tell that man to come to work."

Hammill: "Now, how would you go to Alameda from your house?"

Schwerin: "The street car."

Hammill: "The street car. You'd catch it on 7th Street?"

Schwerin: "We had to---no, the street car ran on 8th Street. On Eighth Street. And then we'd have to transfer."

Hammill: "Where would you transfer?"

Schwerin: "And I had a lot of walking to do."

Hammill: "Yeah, I would say, how would you get across, the High Street Bridge?"

Schwerin: "It would go out to the High Street, there was an old funny bridge there. An old rickety bridge. And it would go over that and where I went was right at the other side of the bridge. Alameda was a mud flat too."

Hammill: "I was going to say: there weren't many houses over there, were there at that time?"

Schwerin: "No, no. Shacks. Little old shacks."

Hammill: "Who lived over there mostly do you think?"

Schwerin: "They were mostly all Italian."

Hammill: "And they were people who were not well-to-do who would just put up these little shacks-"

Schwerin: "Oh no. They were all Italians. They'd come over here and bring their brother, sister, just don't have any money at all and they'd come over ... down in the bottom of the boat. Russie [?] used to tell how he came over and he was down in the hull of the boat and they had to stay there all across the Atlantic Ocean."

Hammill: "Because that was the cheapest passage."

Schwerin: "That was the only passage-"

Hammill: "The only passage they could get."

Schwerin: "Yeah, and they didn't have much money."

Hammill: "And so then they'd come and then stay maybe with someone who had-"

Schwerin: "Some other Italian family here. And they'd sleep, they didn't have sleeping bags in those days either. They'd sleep on any other thing, cover themselves up with rags or carpets or any old thing."

Hammill: "Do you remember, as a ten-year-old child ... on Myrtle Street, that was before the transportation corridors was really evolved on 7th Street. Wasn't it then?"

Interview with Ruth Schwerin

Schwerin: "We had a train."

Hammill: "The train was there at that time-"

Schwerin: "The train only went to Fruitvale. And then later on it went to Melrose."

Hammill: "How did you feel about those neighborhoods of Fruitvale and Melrose? Were they considered better than West Oakland or better than Oakland at that time?"

Schwerin: "Well, it was all greens and new---that was really farmland."

Hammill: "That was country."

Schwerin: "That was country. And we used to love the country."

Hammill: "So, in other words it was very well thought of-"

Schwerin: "But that's why my father moved out there. He figured it would be a good place to raise kids. The weather was good; today, that's the best weather around the Bay here, is Fruitvale."

Hammill: "And so you remember, as you say, when you moved out there, it was just ... large open space."

Schwerin: "All open space. We used to play games---every place I went I had to take my little brother and that would make me mad. So we'd play hide-and-go-seek and we'd hide him in the woods and then we'd go off and forget him."

Hammill: "This was Sam?"

Schwerin: "George. ... because the kids would be going on a picnic up to Laona [?] Heights and I wanted to go and I didn't want to take him and a dog."

End of [original] Tape 1, Side 2

Tape 2, Side 1

[The first part of tape is of a woman speaking in Rumanian (or perhaps Russian?) with a man translating.]

[Schwerin interview continues. Tape is cued up by interviewer.]

Hammill: [They recap discussion about Chiodo Candy Company. Company started in a garage. Husband was a jobber and had a truck. He bought candy from them and resold it. The company moved into an old house on 24th and Peralta. Chiodo made gumball candy. Due to the shortage of sugar during the war the Schwerins loaned them $10,000 to buy cactus sugar in Mexico and import it. They made this transaction with a note. Company paid "every nickle back." The Schwerins doubled their investment as they were able to sell candy at a time when no one else could get it. Chiodo Candy Company maybe worth two million dollars; they are still in business.]

End of Interview

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